

**FULL COMMENTS FOR L-HHS-Ed CONGRESSIONAL HEARING**  
**April 26, 2018**

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Title: President & CEO

Organization: Boys & Girls Clubs of Oklahoma County

Program: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers, Department of Education

Request: \$1.3 billion

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Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing about the importance of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers a program through the Department of Education. My name is Jane Sutter and I actually have been in D.C. this week with American Mother's Inc. representing my state as the Oklahoma Mother of the Year. I am a "real" mother and have two wonderful biological sons, but the MOY award was most certainly given to me because of the 3,342 kids I "mother" through my role as the President & CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Oklahoma County. And that's what I want to talk to you about today—how we can help ALL OUR KIDS!

This generation of youth is the first in our Country's history to not be better off than their parents. Being from Oklahoma, I am perhaps more acutely aware of this crisis than most, as our youth are even more at risk than their national counterparts:

- Most of the members of our Boys & Girls Clubs attend Oklahoma City Public Schools, which has a dropout rate of 27% and even higher among children of color
- Oklahoma is #2 in the Country for teen pregnancies
- One out of every 10 kids in my state have now or have had an incarcerated parent
- Juveniles account for 11% of arrests made in Oklahoma
- And sadly, suicide is the second leading cause of death for our 10-24 year olds

However, I in no way want to imply that these problems are unique to kids in our state. One of the most cost effective and proven solutions to these challenges around the country is to bridge the opportunity gap that exists with quality, affordable programs for youth after school. Every

day 11.3 million children are alone and unsupervised after school when juvenile crime peaks. But when schools are out, Boys & Girls Clubs are IN! Participation in a quality after school program can make a tremendous difference in the trajectory a young person's life can take.

Let me take just a minute to tell you about my organization, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Oklahoma County. We started in 1995 with a small Clubhouse in a 7,000 square foot building in a city park; we quickly outgrew that space and began a capital campaign to build the wonderful 35,000 square foot clubhouse we now call home. A recent comparison of crime statistics in a three-mile radius around the park when the program began and 21 years later showed a dramatic decrease in every type of crime imagined, so the Club was a gift to the community in addition to the families served.

When I became CEO in 2011, we were rapidly growing, reaching capacity of around 400 youth, 6-18 years old every day after school and during school breaks. Reaching capacity in the new building, we worked to broaden our footprint and serve more youth in our community. Our plan to expand was about partnering with public schools, which allowed us to reach the kids where they already were.

Thanks to the investments prioritized by this subcommittee, our first school site started as a **21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center!** Our partnership with Santa Fe South (SFS) Elementary School in south Oklahoma City was our first school-based Club. We now have three clubs in schools and have doubled the number of youth we are able to serve through those partnerships.

In the 4.5 years we have been operating our SFS Club, we have served around 250 Club members each year and typically maintain a waiting list of around 70. Eighty-two percent of the families at SFS Boys & Girls Club report an income of less than \$40,000 a year.

Nationally, Boys & Girls Clubs, provide access to out-of-school time programming for over 4 million youth annually. There are 4,300 Clubs, located in every state and nearly all Congressional districts across the country, in urban and rural communities, within schools and public housing, on Native lands, and on U.S. military installations at home and abroad. In 2016, 212 Boys & Girls Clubs in 48 states, D.C. and Puerto Rico received 21st CCLC funding for 565 sites. This competitive grant provides crucial resources in local communities across the country and establishes support systems youth need for their success.

A growing body of evidence proves that after-school and summer learning programs are effective at improving grades, school attendance, and higher aspirations for graduating and going on to college. And we can demonstrate the impact of Boys & Girls Clubs programs:

- 97% of Club teens expect to graduate and 88% expect to complete a postsecondary education
- 68% of Club 12th graders volunteer in their communities, compared to 39% of their peers nationally
- 84% of Club 12th graders abstain from alcohol use, compared to 58% of their peers nationally

The statewide goals of 21<sup>st</sup> Century programs funded through the Oklahoma Department of Education are to improve both academic and non-academic outcomes; provide a physically and emotionally safe place to attend; continual instruction to promote healthy bodies, minds and habits; provide opportunities for parents and students to learn and connect with their community together; and build organizational capacity to deliver high-quality programming. Those goals align beautifully with the work of Boys & Girls Clubs which help keep young people safe during out-of-school time hours by providing opportunities to improve academic performance, build character and leadership skills, and increase physical activity.

We meet those objectives by providing diverse programming, including Power Hour (homework help), technology, art, music, dance, character and leadership opportunities and multiple sports including flag football, basketball, soccer and volleyball. The most important ingredient, however, is caring adult role models.

The Boys & Girls Club presence at Santa Fe South Elementary School brought many additional resources, opportunities and partnerships to the school—again leveraging those federal dollars to do even more. Just to name a few...

- Building of a Dream Court, 4-goal basketball court by the Nancy Lieberman Foundation and World Ventures
- A partnership with the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma to provide meals and snacks
- Microsoft DigiGirls Camps
- Calm Waters, a local grief processing group, has provided small group discussions to help our Club members deal positively with challenges in their lives (and there are many)
- SFS Club kids were special guests of Kevin Durant's MVP Award Ceremony when he was still with the Oklahoma City Thunder

The Club and its members have received multiple accolades and recognitions, including being named 2015 Community Partner of the Year by the Santa Fe South School Board and receiving the 2017 Program of the Year award from the Oklahoma Boys & Girls Clubs Professional Association. Additionally, one of our Club Members received the 2017 James Finch Community Service award from the Neighborhood Alliance and another SFS Club member received the first

place award two years in a row for the Oklahoma Tree Bank Foundation's drawing contest. The winner gets to attend a banquet where his/her drawing is put on a T-shirt and sold to raise money and awareness.

To quote Mrs. Figueroa, the SFS Principal, "Thank you for your work to keep our Club going. It is so much a part of what we do every single day that we would be lost without it."

Perhaps the ultimate proof of what a great thing this 21<sup>st</sup> Century Partnership started is that the Boys & Girls Clubs of Oklahoma County has raised local money to keep the program going as we complete the fifth and last year of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century grant. While we are completing our grant at SFC, there is great need for more 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center programs in Oklahoma and across the country. I respectfully ask that you invest in youth and support 21st Century Community Learning Centers at \$1.3 billion for the fiscal year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations.

As you consider your priorities for the coming year, please remember that our kids must come first, and **THEY ARE ALL OUR KIDS!**